**Background:** (Events in Europe Lead to the Age of Exploration)

**Europe Becomes Isolated After the fall of Rome:**

Following the fall of Rome, Europe entered the Early Middle Ages. During this time, Europe becomes isolated from the rest of the world. Most Europeans were living in feudal system as serfs. They lived in ignorance and poverty, and had a little knowledge about their daily life.

**The Crusades Spark Europe’s reawakening:**

By participating in the crusades, thousands of Europeans had the opportunity to visit distant lands. They observed unfamiliar cultures and became acquainted with new products and luxuries. They brought home with them spices, such us pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves .Spices preserved foods and improved their taste. Soon all Europe wanted to buy these previous, unknown products of the Orient.

**Marco Polo Stimulates Interest in the Orient:**

*The Book of Marco Polo*, which was widely read throughout Europe, further increased the demand for eastern products. By providing information about the distant lands that produced these goods, it encourages European merchants to consider the possibility of traveling to the Orient and buying directly from the producers.

**Other Countries Hope to Break the Italian Monopoly:**

Throughout the 1300 and 1400 s, the commercial cities of Italy controlled the European trade in Eastern goods. Over this span of time, Portugal, Spain, France, and England gradually became unified nations under strong and ambitious monarchs. A spirit of national pride developed in these Atlantic-coast countries. They resented the Italian monopoly of Eastern trade and wanted a share for themselves.

**Scientific Progress Encourages Exploration**

**1. Aids to Navigation.** Technical improvements made longer voyages possible. *Compass* enabled navigators to steer a course when beyond sight of land. An improved *astrolabe* helped sailor’s measure latitude and thus determine their position at sea. An improved *rudder* gave mariner better control over a ship’s steering.

**2. Printing:** led to the wide distribution of maps, sea charts, and travelers 'tales. These publications increased geographic knowledge and aroused curiosity about distant countries.

**3. Maps:** *cartographers* (mapmakers) prepared more accurate charts of the sea, adding new geographic details as reported by sailors and other travelers.

**4. Gunpowder.** The introduction of gunpowder into Europe from China led to the development of cannon and muskets. Armed with these new weapons, sailors and exploding parties had little to fear from natives in strange lands.

**Portugal Finds a New Route to the Orient:**

Portugal was the first European country to launch voyages of exploration. Chiefly responsible was *Prince Henry* known as « the navigator.» He founded a school of navigation and sent expeditions to explore the western coast of Africa. By the time of his death in 1460, Portuguese mariners had discovered the Azores, Madeira, and The Cape Verde Islands in the Atlantic, and had ventured 1500 miles down the African coast.

**Columbus Reaches America:**

In August, 1492, Columbus departed from Palos, Spain, with a small crew and three ships: *Santa Maria, the Pinta , and the Niňa*.

**The World is divided:**

In 1493the Pope drew a *Line of Demarcation* from the North Pole to the South Pole about 300 miles to the west of the Azores in the Atlantic. The following year this line was moved 1.000 miles farther west. Portugal could claim all newly found lands east of the line; Spain, all territories east of it. Thereby, Spain was given control over all of the Western Hemisphere except Brazil, which fell on the Portuguese side. Portugal was given a free hand in Africa and the Far East. Portugal and Spain accepted the Line of Demarcation. The other European countries ignored.

**The New World is Named "America"**

*Amerigo Vespucci*, an Italian navigator, participated in several voyages of exploration to the Western Hemisphere. He accompanied a Spanish expedition that explored the northern coast of South America(1499).part of which had already been visited by Columbus,and joined a portuguese expedition that sailed down the coast of Brazil(1501). In letters describing his exloits,he claimed that he had discovered an unknown continent- a New World. A geographer mistakenly credired Vespucci with the discovery of a land mass not seen by Columbus and suggested that it be called “America”. In Amerigo Vespucci ‘s honor.